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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: U.S. MISSION WORKS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ON  
THEIR ELECTION REFORM EFFORTS

REF: A. ABUJA 2521

[1](#)B. LAGOS 0005

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[1](#)1. (U) Summary: On May 19 to 21, Ambassador hosted three civil society workshops in Abuja, Lagos and Port Harcourt with PAS, IFESH, and USAID civil society (CSO) partners which were attended by representatives from 100 CSOs. The workshops entitled "Electoral Reform: Building Strong Coalitions and Using New Media Tools" were organized in response to CSO partners' requests for technical assistance and capacity building. Visiting IFESH President Dr. Julie Sullivan was the keynote speaker at all three events. Throughout the workshops, Ambassador and Dr. Sullivan emphasized the importance of building strong coalitions and using new media tools for public outreach and awareness. She and Dr. Sullivan encouraged CSOs to communicate with each other in order to become "an association of associations" through which they can promote dialogue and awareness. Guest speaker Dr. Julie Sullivan, President and CEO of the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH), used the 2008 U.S. Election process and her late father's activism as case studies to explain the role civil society has in a democracy, the importance of building strong coalitions, and the power of community outreach. Public Affairs' Information Resource Officer explained how CSOs can use new media tools for community outreach and networking. The participants discussed the need to use their expanded knowledge of media tools to promote democratic changes from within Nigeria; the impact of social media tools on reducing conflicts ) especially when youth are empowered; how social media can be used to promote transparency; the role of media tools in electoral reforms; and, other challenges Nigeria faces, such as poor infrastructure. The three events received acclaim from CSOs, received ample media coverage, and provide a platform to highlight USG concern for civilians in the current military operations in the Niger Delta. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On May 19 to 21, the Ambassador and visiting IFESH President Dr. Julie Sullivan hosted a series of three workshops for civil society in Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt entitled "Electoral Reform: Building Strong Coalitions and Using New Media Tools." The forums were

organized in response to previous civil society organizations' (CSOs) requests for capacity building and technical assistance. The focus of the discussions was on how building strong coalitions and using new media tools can be used to promote democratic principles including election reform. Ambassador told the participants that the U.S. Mission is committed to encouraging civil society to work together on practical activities to promote Nigerian democracy, and hoped the media tools presented to them would help them in this regard. However, she cautioned that while the United States can be a partner and friend to Nigeria, it is up to Nigerians to implement electoral reform.

13. (U) Dr. Julie Sullivan, President and CEO of IFESH, gave a speech entitled "The Role of Civil Society in Promoting Democratic Values in a Just Society," which used the 2008 U.S. Election process as well as her late father's activism as case studies to explain the role civil society has in a democracy, the importance of building strong coalitions, and the power of community outreach. Public Affairs' Information Resource Officer (IRO) explained how new media tools can be used for community outreach. Using Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Blogger, the Department's similar sites, and other popular social media as examples, she explained the function of each tool and gave examples of how each can be utilized by grassroots organizations to do outreach, seek input, network, and inform. After the presentation, participants shared their questions and comments which are listed by theme below.

#### Democratic Change From Within

14. (U) Participants emphasized the need for democratic changes to begin from within Nigerian society. One

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participant in Abuja emphasized that Nigerians must first believe in their own country in order to improve their democracy. They also discussed the role of Nigerian CSOs as the "owners" of change and the fact that they must take responsibility for change rather than relying on the USG to guide them. Reverend Dangiwa of the Interfaith Mediation Center in Kaduna encouraged his colleagues to look inward to address what they can change, rather than blaming the government. In Lagos, Reverend Father Vincent Ajayi of Atan Justice Development and Peace Center said he will plan a meeting for the CSOs to come together on their own to discuss issues. In Abuja, Frances Alimgbe, Provincial Secretary of the Justice/Health, Development and Peace Commission of the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja, said that he believed CSOs needed to take ownership of outreach efforts and form their own group. In response Ambassador reiterated that the purpose of the workshop was to share with CSOs some new tools as part of our response to their request for capacity building. In Abuja, Peter Mancha of the Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria, challenged his colleagues to not let their involvement end with the training, saying they must "act on what they have learned."

15. (U) Some participants, however, said that the reality on the ground was that the GON was so unaccountable to its citizens that only pressure from Nigeria's international partners could make a difference. One participant cited the government's rejection of some of the Electoral Reform Committee's most important recommendations (which were partially developed from the proposals of ordinary Nigerians) as an example of the futility of their efforts. Yusuf Usman of Conflict Mitigation and Management Regional Council of Kaduna project said the Nigerian public has been too patient and will not stand up and fight for their rights because they are told "ka yi hakuri" (a common Hausa phrase meaning "be patient").

#### Youth

16. (U) Participants suggested that job training opportunities

could diminish youth unrest and that empowerment of Nigeria's youth could be the first step to diminish conflict. In Lagos, George Sotade, President of the Nigerian Youth Council, said CSOs are seeking to increase educational and employment opportunities for youth and to create a culture that encourages young people to pursue peace and not resort to violence. Sotade requested that the USG "address solutions for non-violence" and provide more training for youth in computer and Internet use, including new forms of social media. He suggested that engaging youth in technology could be a way to reach out to unemployed youths in the Niger Delta, and said such educational opportunities would decrease the incidence of violence among the youth of southern Nigeria. In Abuja, Imam Fuad Adeyemi of Al-Habibiyyah Mosque opined that the social media tools were too elitist and that other needs in Nigeria, such as education, need to be taken care of first so that people can be empowered to use technology. He praised India for its use of technology kiosks which provide Indians at all socio-economic levels access to the Internet. The Ambassador encouraged Fuad to view the social media training as powerful coalition-building tools that can be used to address education and other social sector needs.

#### Using Social Media for Transparency

17. (U) Civil society representatives discussed how mobile phones and forms of social media can be used to enhance transparency with law enforcement officials and enable people to report undemocratic activities immediately, thus mobilizing civil society to react quickly. Sandra Obiogo, Executive Director of Communicating for Change, requested more information on how to use SMS text messaging and other mobile phone accessible web-sites for outreach. Another participant shared information on how camera phones can be used to capture human rights abuses, as she recounted a case where someone was beaten by police and took photos which

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instantly reached a network of doctors and lawyers who could provide assistance. In Port Harcourt, one participant asked Dr. Sullivan how Nigeria can establish a level playing field for civil society groups, saying, "in the U.S., in the past, one got arrested for standing up but in Nigeria you get killed." Sullivan explained that civil society organizations, joined together in a strong interconnected network, could support each other. She said, "I am not urging civil disobedience, but rather argue that you should use Internet and the technology tools taught today to get your message across." Diigbo Goodluck, President of Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, said Nigeria needs democracy that is accountable. He encouraged coalition-building among CSOs and civil society as well as in the business community and government.

#### Electoral Reform

18. (U) Participants suggested that this type of training should be extended to political parties. In addition, many participants said the presentation by the IRO renewed their hope that electoral reform is possible. Abubakr Siddeeq of the National Mosque said after the 2007 elections he was so discouraged that he had vowed not to participate in any other election event, but that after this workshop he is "transformed" and "changed". However, not all participants were convinced that the new media tools would help on community outreach. One participant said "we need face to face discussions to change the ballot process." In response, the Ambassador explained that the new media tools presented by the IRO are not meant to replace face to face dialogue among or between CSOs. Instead, she said, "this is an additional tool kit you can use to complement what you are already doing. Of course certain challenges require face to face support, but this is an additional form of capacity building for you. You are the network and you have to decide how you want to grow and be effective."

## Other Challenges

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¶9. (U) Several participants noted the general lack of infrastructure in Nigeria and the energy crisis which makes using the Internet or high tech social networking skills difficult. But others said their organizations have already started to use social media tools such as Facebook and MySpace to network internationally and the workshop by the IRO provides additional uses to enhance their current activities. Fatimah Abdulkareem, President of the Nigerian Association of Women Journalists, said the problem was not just that Nigerians do not always have all the equipment necessary to use on-line tools, they also often did not realize the importance and extent of social media.

¶10. (U) The Ambassador offered to continue to use her good offices to host quarterly workshops for PAS and IFESH and other civil society organizations. Participating organizations were invited to use on-line social media to continue their dialogue with each other and outreach to their constituents. Participants expressed appreciation for the capacity building workshops and were overall enthusiastic about the new social media tools highlighted by the IRO, and said continuing to partner with the U.S. Mission on future workshops of this kind would be useful.

¶11. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS